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## BLACK DEATH

A STEEL STERLING STORY

STEEL STERLING smiled broadly and slapped Jimmy Denning on the shoulder. "Congratulations on your performance tonight, Jimmy," he said. "How does it feel to finish up your first month as star of the show?"

"Swell!" said Jimmy. His eyes suddenly clouded over. "But I keep thinking about Rob Minton—of the tough break he got when they threw him out of the show and gave me his part. . . ."

"Forget it, kid," said Steel.
"Minton was drinking heavily, and the producer knew what he was doing when he threw him out." He smiled again.
"Come on, kid, forget it and tell me all about this theatre business."

Jimmy's eyes shone. "It's been marvelous, Why, I've just finished sending out a batch of autographed photos to people who wrote in asking for them. Imagine—people asking for my autograph! I—" His face turned sheet-white and he staggered back a step.

Steel rushed forward. "Jimmy! What's the matter!"

Jimmy's face had gone from white to near-black. He coughed spasmodically. "Steel!" he mumbled. "Steel! I—feel—funny—" His head dropped back.

Steel winced. "He's dead!"
He said the words simply, but
there was a tightness in his
voice. He laid Denning's body
on the couch and walked out
of the room.

Steel Sterling zipped swiftly backstage and entered the office of Joe Mitchell, producer of the show. "Joe," he said, "Jimmy Denning's been-murdered!"

Joe Mitchell was sitting at his desk, his head on his chest. Steel walked over to shake him—and stopped. Joe Mitchell's face was black.

"Mitchell, too," said Steel. He stared at the desk, where Mitchell had been working over a pile of unanswered correspondence.

"The method of murder right before me," he said. "I think I'd better drop in to see Rob Minton."

Rob Minton was sitting in on a poker game. He had been drinking and he looked up with bleary, unexcited eyes as Steel Sterling entered the room.

"Steel Sterling, eh?" he said.
"Friend of Jimmy Denning's.
Get out! No friend of that rat
is welcome here."

"Minton," said Steel slowly,
"Jimmy Denning and Joe
Mitchell were murdered ten
minutes ago. . . ."

Minton looked surprised and happy. "That doesn't make me sad," he said. He looked up suddenly, threw his cards on the table. "What's that got to do with me?" he asked.

"I thought," Steel said, "that you might know something about it."

"Not a thing," said Minton.
"This poker game's been going
on for hours, and I haven't
left the room once."

"They were poisoned," said Steel.

"Still better," said Minton.
"How could I have anything
to do with it? Poison's got to
be administered. I haven't been

around the theatre all this month—ask the doorman and the people up front."

Steel's eyes hardened. He reached out and pulled Minton out of his chair. "I'm through playing," he said. "You sent both Denning and Mitchell return envelopes—Denning's to return a requested photo, and Mitchell in answer to some business. You used assumed names, and when they licked the flaps to seal the envelopes, poison mixed in with the paste killed them!"

Minton breathed heavily for a minute. Then he said softly, "Get him!"

A gun cracked, but Steel was not there to receive the bullet. He had leaped through the air, still clutching Minton. When the bullet bit into the wall, he dropped to the ground and, simultaneously, clipped Minton on the jaw. Minton's head snapped back, and he slid to the ground.

Then Sterling got to work on the other poker players. There were four of them.

Steel did it very methodically. He simply zipped through the air, dropped in back of a thug, spun him around, and sent a sizzling blast to his jaw. He repeated this procedure four times and his work was over.

Weeks later, Steel read of Minton's conviction by a jury. The sentence was death in the electric chair. But there was no satisfaction in the Man of Steel's eyes . . . just a sadness that criminals had to learn the hard way that Crime does not pay!









































































## CORPSES AREN'T CRAZY

## A BLACK HOOD STORY

KIP BURLAND saw that it was almost twelve noon by the clock on Dr. Irving's desk, and he got to his feet. Dr. Irving followed him to the door.

"Thanks a lot for the info, Doc," said Kip. "You've been

most interesting."

Dr. Irving waved a deprecatory hand. "Think nothing of it," he said. "We get some pretty unusual insanity cases up

here at the asylum.'

They shook hands, and Kip started to leave. Suddenly he turned back, a curious look on his face. "Just one more thing," he said. "I understand all you told me about the dangerous insanities—paranoia, schizophrenia, dementia praecox—all those types where the maniac will kill... but how come you let this servant of yours, this Walter, go and do as he pleases? He's a patient, isn't he?"

"Walter Lincott, you mean?"
Dr. Irving smiled. "Oh, some small-town physician in Ohio sent him here as a charity patient, and he cleans up and does odd jobs for me to sort of pay his board. He's perfectly harmless—mild melancholia case: mind of a seven year old child."

Kip thumbed his chin. "Funny," he said. "I've got the oddest feeling that I've seen him before." He shrugged. "Well, it's none of my business, and I'm rather late for my luncheon date with Barbara. So long,

Doc."

Barbara pouted prettily. "Kip Burland," she said,

"you're late!"

Kip smiled. "Awfully sorry, Barbara," he said. "I dropped up to visit my old classmate, Ian Irving, who's now head doctor at the State Insane Asylum, and he got to talking so interestingly that time just passed."

"Never mind," smiled Barbara. She took Kip's arm. "Let's go have our lunch." They walked a step or two, and Kip stopped in his tracks. "Oh, heck," he said. "I left my hat in the Doc's office. Will you wait just a few minutes, Barb? I'll run back and get it."

He ran down the street, taking huge steps. In half a minute, he was at the asylum, up the stairs, and through the open

door into the office.

He stopped and breath burst tightly from between his clenched teeth. Dr. Ian Irving was lying with his head on his desk, his own letter opener deep in his forehead. Blood dripped crimsonly onto the green deskblotter.

Kip stared for a minute, stiffly. Then he heard footsteps and he darted behind the screenpartition which Dr. Irving had used when changing from medical clothes to street costume each night. Kip quickly removed his outer clothing and emerged as—The Black Hood!

He found an opening in the partition and stood watching

and listening.

Walter Lincott, the feebleminded patient, walked into the room with a man The Black Hood recognized as the Chief Assistant of the asylum.

The Chief Assistant gibbered excitedly. "Murdered!" he screeched. "My God!" He looked at Lincott. "Was there anybody in the room when you found Irving dead?"

"Nobody in room," replied Lincott. He smiled foolishly.

The Chief Assistant gibbered on. "I've got to report this to the Board even before I call the police. You stay here and see that nobody gets into the room." He dashed out, muttering something mournful about bad publicity.

As soon as the Chief Assistant had left, Lincott reached into his pocket and took out several closely typewritten sheets. He stared at them, put them back into his pocket, and smiled. His lips twisted, and he looked oddly horrible.

Behind the partition, The Black Hood swept into action. His hunch about having seen Lincott before was correct!

"Lincott?" he whispered. The

patient whirled.

"Lincott!" The Black Hood said again. "I recognize you now. You're 'Tiger' Bernard, who escaped from the state pen two months ago!"

"Tiger" Bernard snarled.

"The Black Hood!"

"Pretty good idea, having some crocked sawbones enter you in this asylum till your escape blew over," The Black Hood said. "This is a perfect hide-out."

"Sure," said Bernard. "Only I faked it too well! Irving was writing an article about insanity cases for The Criminology and Psychiatry Journal, and he was all set to send my picture. I wasn't taking any chances, so I knocked him off." Suddenly a knife was in his hand and he lunged. "And you're next to die," he said.

The Black Hood leaped sidewards. He got hold of Bernard's wrist and threw the fake patient to the floor. Bernard got up, and The Black Hood clipped him neatly on the jaw. Again Bernard got up, and again The Black Hood hit him. This time he did not get up.

The Chief Assistant and two members of the Board rushed into the room. "We heard it all," said the Chief Assistant. "We were going to help you, but you didn't seem to need any help."

"You've heard enough to hang him," said The Black Hood. Suddenly he smiled ruefully. "I'd better get out of here," he said to himself. "A certain young lady must be very, very angry."

## in SHIELD - WIZARD # 7

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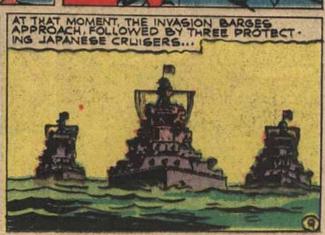














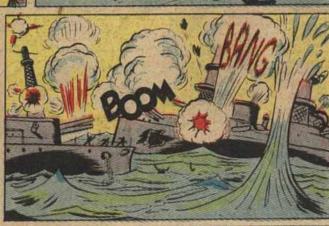








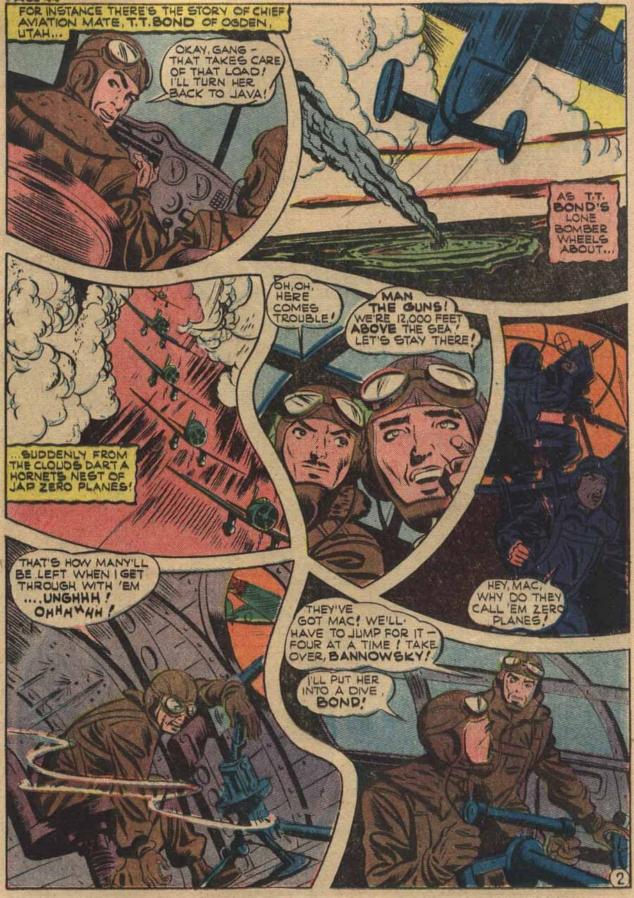






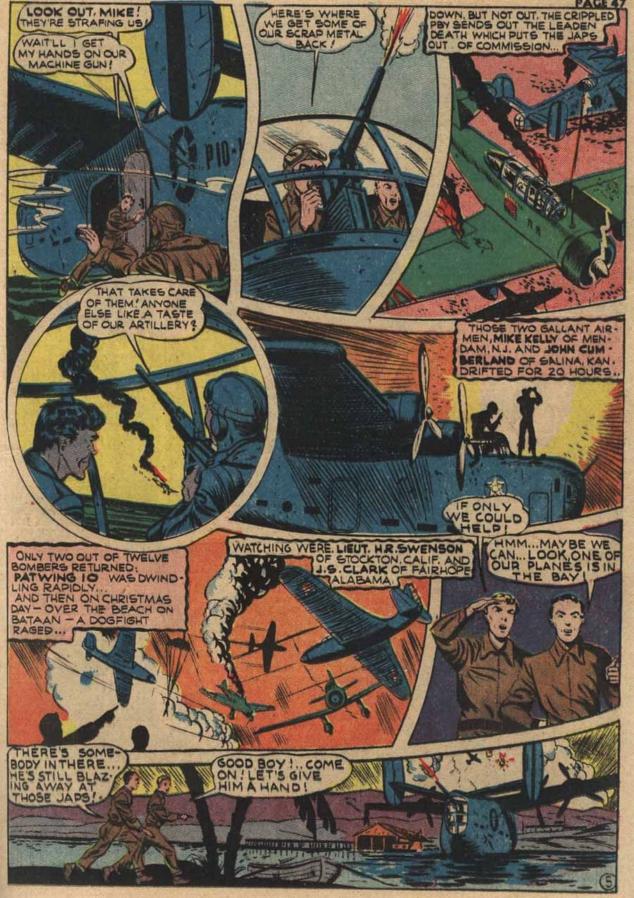


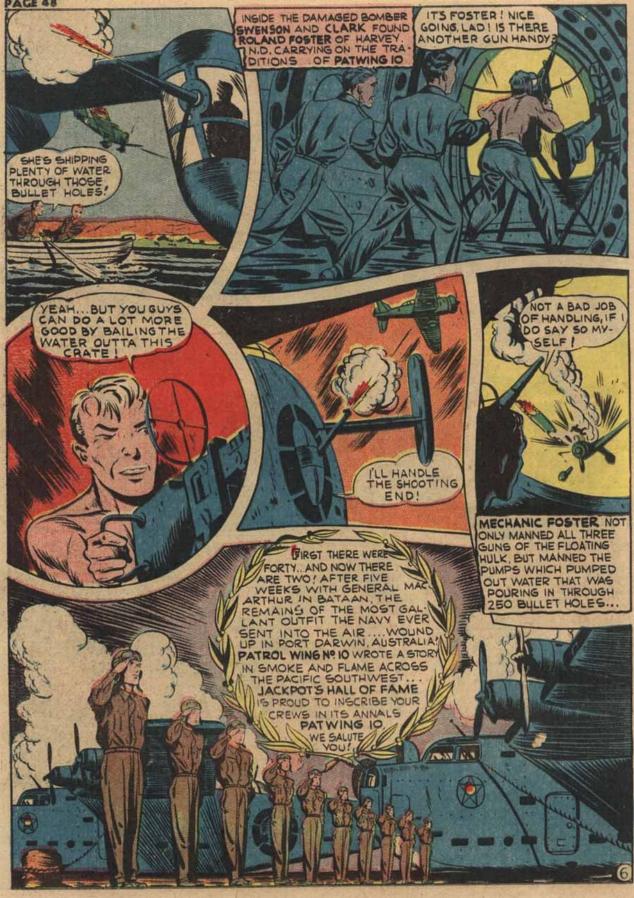














## LAUGH! LAUGH! LAUGH!

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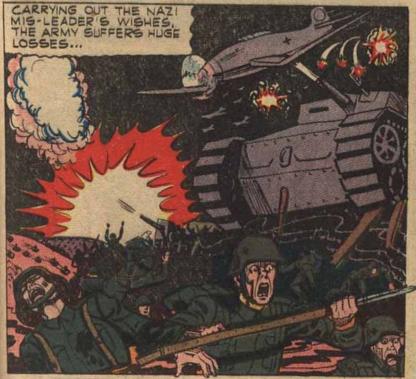




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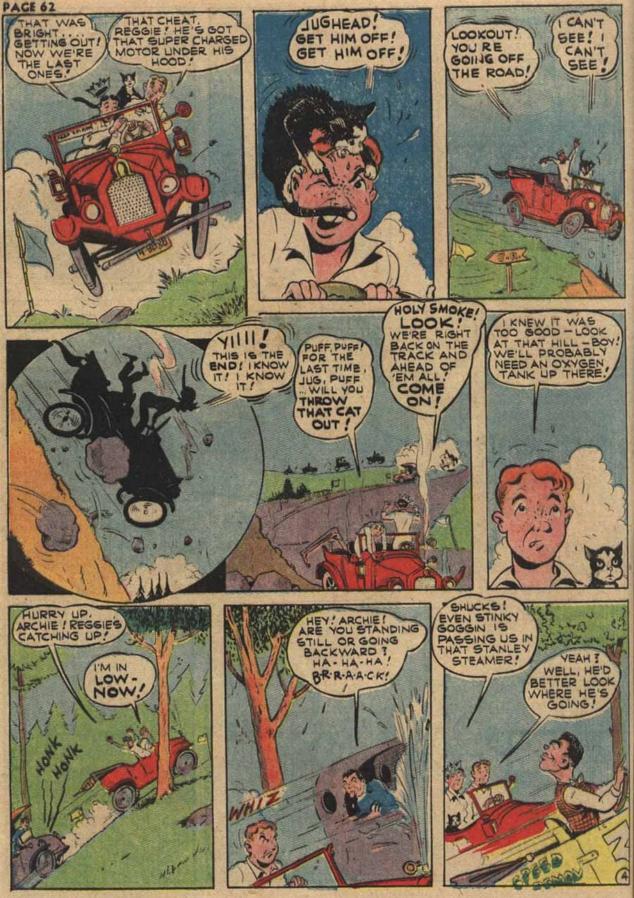
















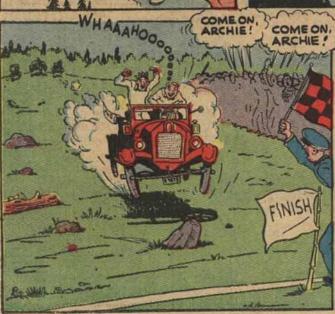






























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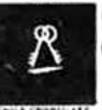
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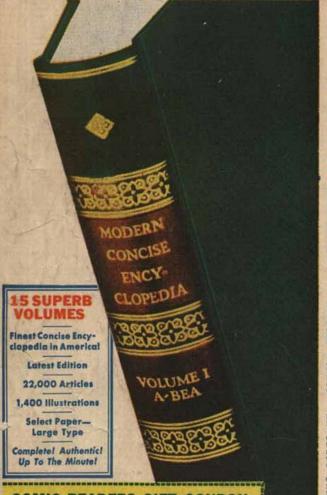
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